



Photo by Staci Perry



Sweet Holiday Traditions

Editor's Warning: the following contains references to wonderful holiday treats from South Dakotans who cherish their ethnic, family and community traditions.

I am only half-kidding. We got more than we bargained for in our hunt for favorite Christmas culinary delights. Some of the stories you're about to read come from food writers and bloggers who handle words as well as rolling pins, so they know how to entice a hungry reader.

You'll learn new ways to make cookies, and even how to use the grease from your Christmas goose. But the real message here is to recognize and appreciate the food traditions in your own life.

Just remember, we are not responsible for any accidental or sudden changes in your holiday routine that may occur as a result of reading about Grandma Janet's White Cookies or other such delicacies.

—The editor

White Cookie Tradition

by Staci Perry



My Grandma Janet has always arrived at Christmas dinners carrying a bucket delicately packed with thin, white cookies twinkling with fine sugar. A few years ago, we allowed ourselves to accept that grandma, who turned 87 in October, would not be the white cookie matriarch forever. She happily shared the recipe with us, which is particularly light on instruction, and said, “I don’t do anything special to them.” I knew it was time for me to learn how to make her signature cookies.

As we baked that day, I pictured my grandpa, his hands the size of Little League gloves, grabbing a handful of grandma’s white cookies and steeping them into his steaming coffee until soggy crumbs floated to the top. It was one of his favorite cookies. But that’s no surprise. His mother gave the white cookie recipe to his lovely bride, and his father made the richly-marbled apple wood rolling pin that grandma still uses.

After almost 70 years of warmly saturating her home with the sweet scent of homemade goodies, grandma’s baking sheets have become almost too heavy for one oven mitt to hold, the dough is getting harder for aged hands to stir, and her kitchen counters have mysteriously grown taller.

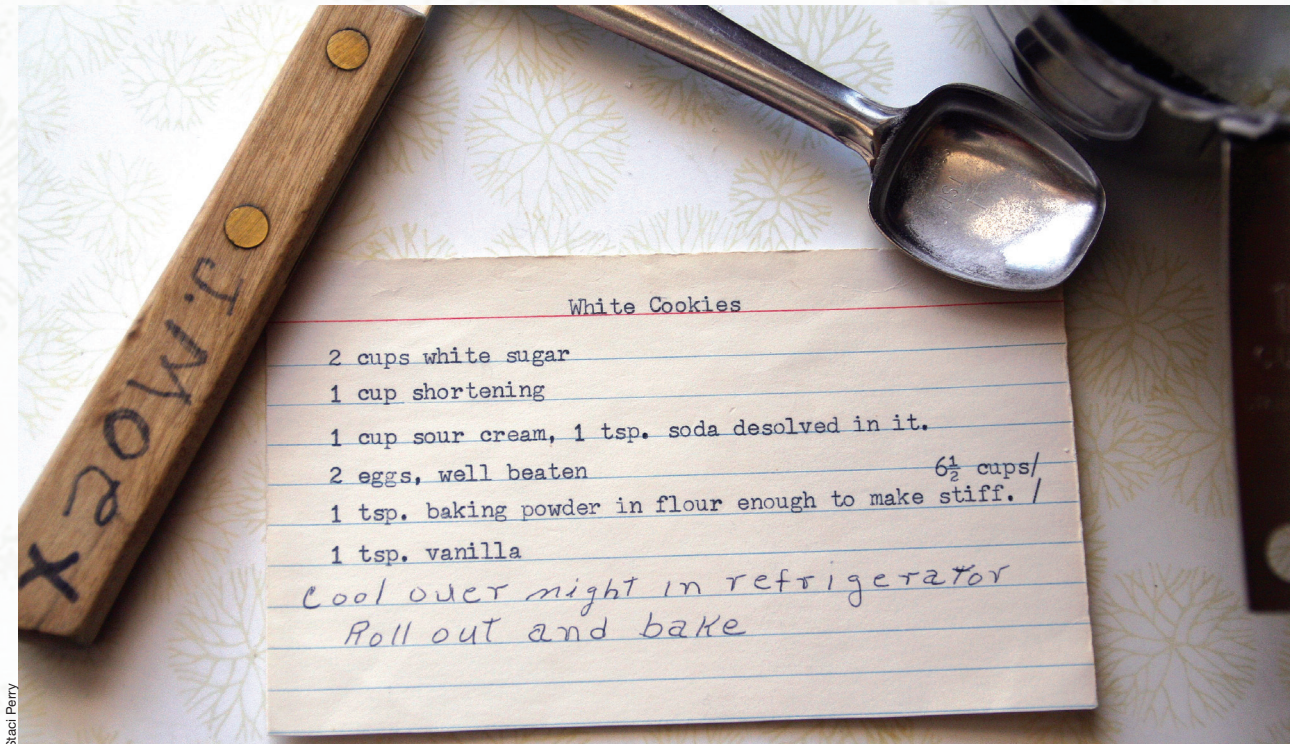
Although my first crack at baking grandma’s cookies taught me that it will take practice before they look perfect like hers, my kids devoured them when I got home. And grandma asked me to come back and make them again. To me, that’s what baking and sharing is all about.

Now it’s my turn to give grandma a tall, plastic bucket overflowing with family tradition and sweet memories that will spread farther than a handful of flour tossed into the South Dakota wind.



Staci Perry photos

Staci Perry (pictured above with her Grandma Janet) blogs at www.RandomSweetnessBaking.wordpress.com. She is also the corporate communications manager for Daktronics in Brookings.



Staci Perry

Grandma Janet's White Cookies

2 cups white sugar
 1 cup vegetable shortening
 (not butter-flavored)
 2 eggs
 1 teaspoon vanilla
 1 cup sour cream, room
 temperature
 1 teaspoon baking soda
 6 1/2 cups flour
 1 teaspoon baking powder
 White sugar to sprinkle on top
 of the cookies
 Flour for rolling out the
 cookies

Prep: Bring the eggs to room temperature, approximately 30 minutes. At the same time, measure 1 cup of sour cream into a medium bowl and stir in 1 teaspoon of baking soda. The sour cream will swell as the soda dissolves.

Make the dough: In the bowl of an electric mixer, beat white sugar and shortening together until creamy.

In a separate bowl, vigorously stir eggs with a table fork or small whisk until well beaten. Add to the sugar mixture and beat on medium-high until combined.

Spoon sour cream into the batter and add vanilla. Beat on medium-high for 3 minutes, turning off the mixer a few times to scrape down the sides of the bowl.

Into a separate large bowl, dump 6 1/2 cups of flour and 1 teaspoon of baking powder, stirring so the powder is

dispersed throughout. Add the flour to the cookie batter 1 cup at a time, beating on medium-low speed after each addition until all the flour is incorporated and the dough is stiff. If it's not firming, sprinkle in more flour until stiff. Depending on the mixer's power, you may need a thick wooden or heavy metal spoon to stir in the last few cups of flour by hand.

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 2 hours or overnight. The batter is ready when it's firm and doesn't stick on your finger. If the dough remains sticky, add a little more flour.

Roll out and bake cookies: Preheat oven to 350 degrees. On a heavily floured surface, roll a handful of cookie dough into a flattened 1/8-inch thick sheet, dusting with flour to prevent sticking.

Cut the cookies using a

lightly floured 2 or 3-inch round biscuit or cookie cutter, turning the cutter slightly as you lift it off the dough. Slide a lightly floured spatula under each cookie to ease it from the surface and transfer to a cookie sheet, lining cookies 1 inch apart. (If the cookie sticks to the counter, there wasn't enough flour on the rolling surface so add more next round.)

Scatter sugar onto the tops of the cookies. Bake 7-8 minutes. The cookies go from white to golden brown in a matter of seconds so watch closely in the last minute. The whiter the cookies, the softer they are in the middle. For a crisper cookie, bake 8-10 minutes, removing from oven as they turn darker brown.

Transfer to cooling rack. Repeat in batches until the dough is gone. Makes approximately seven dozen cookies.

A Colome Christmas

For 15 years, Colome's Fran and Brad Hill have hosted a cozy and casual open house sparkling with Christmassy decor. "I am a freak about Christmas trees," Fran says. "I have five or six decorated and lit in different rooms, and evergreen garland with little white lights draped around the windows. There are enough Christmas lights that we don't need to turn on many of the other lights."

Guests are welcomed into the Hills' home for informal games and conversation, but the menu is what fires their holiday spirit. "Every surface in my kitchen is converted to buffet service," Hill says. "The buffet spread for this party is my time to try both new and old recipes. I like to keep the servings small, with bite-sized portions and mostly finger foods." Her shrimp scampi with chicken sausage and spinach always appears, but there are plenty of sweets, like this favorite recipe for butter pecan fudge.

Watch for more of Fran Hill's holiday treats in her twice-monthly food column for *South Dakota Magazine.com* and at *my-plate.blogspot.com*.



Butter Pecan Fudge

1/2 cup butter	1/8 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup heavy cream	1 cup chopped pecans
1/2 cup sugar	1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/2 cup brown sugar, packed	2 cups powdered sugar

Line an 8-inch baking pan with foil and coat with cooking spray. In a large saucepan, bring the butter, heavy cream, granulated sugar, brown sugar and salt to a boil over medium heat, stirring frequently. Boil 5 minutes, stirring constantly, then remove from heat. Stir in pecans and vanilla. Sift in powdered sugar, and stir until smooth and well combined.

Spread the mixture into prepared baking dish. Cool to room temperature.

Using the edges of the foil, lift the entire block of fudge from the baking pan. Cut into 1-inch cubes and store in an airtight container.



Piedmont Peach Kuchen

BLOGGER AND THRIFTY living maven Merissa Alink has fond memories of holidays spent around her grandmother's picnic table in Piedmont.

"In our German family, kuchen was always a staple, but no one made it like Granny did. In fact no one even tried," she says. When Alink asked for the recipe, she learned there was none. "Like most of the best bakers, she would always tell me she didn't measure; it was just all in her head. Eventually we got her to write down some version of her recipe, but it wasn't the same."

Using her own baking skill, Alink edited the makeshift recipe into something closer to what Granny used to make. "Her crust was always quite thick with very little room for filling." Her grandmother often made a variety of kuchen so everyone could have a slice, but Alink likes peach. "Peaches always taste fresh in a kuchen when you use home-canned like I do."

Merissa Alink shares recipes, money-saving advice and DIY tips at *LittleHouseLiving.com*. She, her husband David and son Jacob are in the process of moving to a small farmstead near Mitchell.



Rachel Roe

The Delicate Rosette

Rachel Roe is a Norwegian in training. Growing up in Cincinnati, Roe never had krumkake, rosettes, kringla and other holiday treats beloved by South Dakota's Scandinavians. After she moved to Brookings in 2004, her husband Jay's family brought her up to speed. "The rosettes and the krumkake, I loved

right off the bat. Krumkake reminds me a lot of Italian pizzelles, which I've had before. I had never heard of the rosettes, but was impressed by how flaky and delicate they are," Roe says.

She hopes to someday teach her young son, Lex, about the food traditions from both sides of his family. To achieve that goal, Roe, who blogs at TramplingRose.com, is learning rosette-making from her mother-in-law, Mary. "They are as fussy as I imagined," Roe says. It's not easy to master heating the rosette iron, dipping it in the thin batter and prying off the fragile cooked rosette with a fork, but the fuss is worth it. "You can't go wrong with fried batter covered in sugar," says Roe.

Peach Kuchen

2 1/4 cups white flour	2 eggs plus 2 egg yolks
1/4 cup shortening	1 cup cream
1/4 cup plus 1 teaspoon sugar	1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
2 teaspoons yeast	2 cups sliced or chopped peaches
1/2 cup warm water	

In a small bowl, mix yeast, water and a teaspoon of sugar. Set aside. In a large bowl, add flour, shortening and two whole eggs, mixing until crumbly. You may need to add a little milk to make dough sticky. Knead dough for several minutes and place in a warm area. Cover and let rise for an hour.

Pat the dough into a greased 9x9 inch pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 15 minutes.

In a medium bowl mix cream, cinnamon and egg yolks. After bread has baked, place chopped peaches in the middle and pour the cream mixture over the top. Bake 30-40 minutes, or until the middle has set. Enjoy warm or cold.

Rosettes

2 eggs	1 teaspoon sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt	1 cup milk
1 cup flour	

Combine all ingredients and blend until smooth. Pour batter into a bread pan or other high-sided dish.

Pour 3 inches of vegetable oil in a Dutch oven or electric wok and heat to 350-400 degrees. Place rosette iron in to heat.

Remove iron when thoroughly heated, letting extra oil drain before dipping it into the batter. (The batter should sizzle and bubble.) Do not let batter cover the top of the iron. Place batter-covered iron back into the oil and cook until the rosette is crisp and golden brown. Remove rosette from iron and drain on newsprint or paper towels. Roll cooled rosettes in vanilla sugar before serving.



Jane Green

Search for Goose Grease

Jane Green's holiday memories include helping her mother kill, clean and process geese. The reason? They needed goose grease to make the family Christmas pfeffernut recipe. "If you make the cookies with plain lard and butter they taste flat," says Green, a retired teacher who lives east of Clark and pens a regular column on rural life for several South Dakota newspapers. "It's like the difference between using bacon grease and just plain lard or oil. The bacon grease brings out the flavor."

Green's family raised their own geese, but when she decided to perfect her mother's recipe, she asked Grant Peterson, longtime host of Brookings' radio show "The Great Afternoon Smorgasbord," for help. Peterson discovered the biggest geese processing plant in the Americas was just a short drive away in Sisseton. The Schiltz family has been processing geese since they moved the business from Iowa in 1981. The Schiltzes started in 1944 when Marlin Schiltz's wife and his sister gave him five Toulouse goose eggs. Two hatched and grew to 12

pounds. Marlin sold them for 12 cents a pound.

Today his sons Richard and Jim run the farm near Sisseton and sell about 120,000 geese during the holidays. But Jim guesses that 99.8 percent of those geese go outside the state. He says one reason is that people who eat goose often shoot a wild one, and that isn't a good representation of how good goose can be. "The wild ones can live for decades, and once a goose passes maturity the meat gets very tough. We only pack young goose for distribution," he says. Another difference is the taste. Often wild geese dine on minnows or other small fish, making their meat taste fishy. "They also play in the mud, and that can have an unpleasant carryover to the meat as well," he says.

Schiltz describes goose as much "beefier" than the popular holiday chicken. Besides selling goose for the holiday table, the Schiltzes sell goose grease, once a staple in Green's pfeffernuts.

Photo: Grant Peterson demonstrated the art of egg coffee at a goose party held in Brookings last spring.

Plain Jane's Pfeffernuts

2 cups melted butter	4 teaspoons soda
(my mother used	3 teaspoons baking
1 cup melted	powder
goose grease,	8 cups flour
1 cup melted	2 teaspoons cloves
butter)	2 teaspoons ginger
4 cups sugar	1/2 teaspoon salt
1 cup molasses	2 teaspoons cin-
4 eggs	namon

Combine shortening, sugar and molasses in large mixing bowl. In separate bowl, beat the eggs then add them to mixture in first bowl and mix thoroughly. In another large bowl combine soda, baking powder, flour, cloves, ginger, cinnamon and salt. Slowly add flour mixture into first bowl. Make sure to thoroughly mix. Divide mixture into smaller portions and roll out into long ropes about 1 to 1.5 inches in diameter. Dough will make about 11 long ropes per batch. Place ropes on a cookie sheet and put in the refrigerator overnight. The next day, take ropes out one at a time and slice into 3/4 inch pieces. These are about the size of a quarter unbaked and spread out to about the size of a half dollar when done.

Bake at 400 degrees for 6-8 minutes. Baking time and temperature vary. Do not grease cookie sheets.

Holiday Traditions Celebrated in Ink

EVERY CHRISTMAS, cooks near Timber Lake share recipes for a local holiday cookbook. Jim and Kathy Nelson, publishers of the *Timber Lake Topic*, have printed the cookbook for the last 10 years. “We get quite a few German and German-Russian recipes, reflecting the ethnic population here,” Kathy says. “Recipes for kuchen and knoephla soup spelled all different ways.”

The books arrive with the newspapers in December, and it’s an issue readers anticipate. “Each year we get calls from readers who didn’t receive the cookbook,” Kathy says. “Two years in a row we got a call from the Department of Revenue in Pierre the day after the holiday cookbook was mailed. Both times, I thought, ‘Oh now, did I mess up on my sales tax report?’ But both times it was the office staff letting us know that their newspaper had arrived without the cookbook,” Kathy laughs. “We aren’t blaming the U.S. Postal Service or the capital mail room staff, but we do wonder why that happened to that cookbook two years in a row.”

This year the cookbook project is bittersweet for the paper’s readers because Jim Nelson died on Oct. 3.

The *Topic* staff mail the cookbook for \$4 (which includes postage). Call the *Timber Lake Topic* at (605) 865-3546 or send a \$4 check to *Timber Lake Topic*, P.O. Box 10, Timber Lake, SD 57656.

Caramel Rolls

Mary Biegler of Timber Lake is a regular contributor to the *Topic’s* Holiday Cookbook. This recipe makes around 36 to 40 rolls so you will need at least three 13x9 inch pans. The rolls can be made all at once or begin in the afternoon and let the rolls sit in a cool spot overnight in the pans, then leave on the counter for 1 hour before baking in the morning.

4 1/2 cups water	4 eggs, beaten
2 cups sugar	2 packages of yeast (or 4 1/2 teaspoons)
2 tablespoons salt	additional sugar, cinnamon and butter to
1 cup shortening	sprinkle on dough
12 cups flour (divided into four cups and eight cups)	

Bring four cups of water and two cups of sugar to a simmer for about five minutes until the sugar dissolves. Add two tablespoons of salt. Add one cup of shortening while the mixture is still hot. Allow to cool.

Mix together four cups of flour, four beaten eggs and two packages of yeast which has been dissolved in 1/2 cup of warm water. Add this to the original mixture. Mix in additional flour — Mary estimates between 7 and 8 1/2 cups, but remember to keep the dough soft. Knead for five minutes. Allow to rise in a large, greased bowl until doubled in size. This could take from 1-3 hours. In the meantime, make the caramel sauce recipe below and divide it among the pans. When the dough has doubled, knead again, divide the dough in half and roll out each half into a long rectangle about 10 inches wide by 15 inches long. Butter each rectangle and heavily sprinkle with a half and half mixture of sugar and cinnamon. Roll the rectangles up starting from the narrow side then slice into 1-inch thick pieces. Mary uses a thread instead of a knife to get cleaner cuts.

Place rolls into the caramelized pans, leaving about 1/2 inch space between each. Let rise until doubled. Bake at 375 degrees for 20-24 minutes.

CARAMEL

2 cups white sugar	2 cups butter
2 cups brown sugar	2 cups vanilla ice cream

Simmer the two sugars and butter until it boils for one minute. Remove from stove and add two cups of ice cream. Mix well and pour into 13x9 inch pans before placing the rolls inside.



The Legend of Springerle Cookies

The Benson family of Brookings likes their Christmas cookies picture perfect. Every year, Leah Benson rolls out an embossed cookie called springerle, which means “little knight” or “jumping horse,” using a special rolling pin carved with pictures.

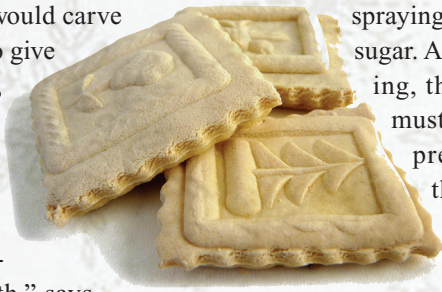
Springerle originated in southwestern Germany. “The legend is that back then, the peasants were so poor that they could not afford to give gifts. To celebrate the winter solstice they would carve the gift they wanted to give into a piece of dough, let it dry, bake it and give it to their loved one. Most carvings were things of nature because they worshipped Mother Earth,” says Benson, who has researched the ancient cookie and teaches classes about it at medieval reenactment fairs. “The dough was leavened with hartshorn, which is a powder that comes from inside a deer’s antler. Today we use baking powder.”

Benson learned about springerle from her grandmother. “She always made these cookies with a special rolling pin that was handed down through the generations. I started collecting these rolling pins when I was 40,” Benson says. Rolling the dough with a springerle pin

or pressing it with a carved mold creates pictures on the cookies — some more intricate than others. “Most of the modern rolling pins have simple nature designs, although I do have one very expensive one with the life of Christ carved into its 24 panels,” Benson says.

Her grandmother’s recipe creates thick, mixer-challenging dough. Benson recommends draping a kitchen towel over the back of the mixer to avoid spraying flour and powdered sugar. After mixing and rolling, the unbaked cookies must dry for 24 hours to preserve the pictures through baking. The cookies bake at a low temperature, resulting in hard, pale-colored treats perfect for dunking in coffee.

Many families bake springerle at Thanksgiving and save them until Christmas to allow the flavor to develop, but Benson’s family eats them right away because they prefer a softer texture. Rolling thicker cookies or baking for less time results in a softer cookie as well, but beware of rolling them too thick. You’ll get cookies that are “humped up and cracked and kind of ugly,” Benson says.



Springerle

4 medium eggs, separated
1 pound powdered sugar
3 cups flour with 1/4 teaspoon baking powder added
1/8 teaspoon anise oil extract, or
flavoring of your choice

Using an electric mixer, beat egg whites in a large bowl until stiff peaks form. In a separate bowl, beat egg yolks for five minutes until light and lemon-colored. Add beaten yolks to egg whites and whip for three minutes. Gradually sift powdered sugar into egg mixture and add anise oil. Slowly add flour and baking powder until dough is stiff, smooth and velvety. You may need to knead in the last of the flour by hand.

Divide the dough into 3 or 4 pieces. On a well-floured surface, roll out each piece 3/8-inch thick using a regular rolling pin. Using a springerle pin, roll across the dough to create imprints. Cut cookies apart and place onto ungreased cookie sheets close together but not touching. Cover with a light kitchen towel. Allow them to dry for 12 hours, then flip to let the undersides dry for another 12 hours.

Flip cookies right side up and bake at 250 degrees for 45 minutes. They may turn tan on the bottom, but should not brown.

Holiday Treats On the Web

South Dakota Magazine has featured many holiday traditions through the years, and we’ve gathered some of our classic, timeless food articles this Christmas season at www.SouthDakotaMagazine.com/christmas-2013.

Some of the stories we’ll post online for this happy season include:

- “Sweet Time” tells the story of South Dakotans who make chocolate fudge for prisoners in our state penitentiaries.
- “Krumkake at Gayville” introduces you to Swede

and Ardys Olson, who work together to carry on a sweet tradition in Yankton County.

- “Kitchen Traditions” is a story about treasured family recipes for peanut brittle, plum dumpplings and pepper cookies.
- “Pumpkin Cinnamon Rolls” reveals an early-morning Thanksgiving treat. Yes, it includes cream cheese icing.
- “Holiday Foods Heritage” is another collection of favorites. Learn about marmalade, breads and Danish cookies.



Confections for a Cause

THERE'S A MAD RUSH as doors open for Yankton's annual cookie walk. It's a fundraiser for the RiverWalk street sculptures and Michelle Andrews makes the most popular sweet — mini gingerbread houses made to perch on a mug. "I don't make a lot of them because they are labor intensive," Andrews says. "But it makes me feel good that money is being raised for a cause that I like."

An avid crafter and quilter, Andrews got the idea for the tiny treats while browsing projects on the Internet. She made the first batch three years ago, trimming the walls, rooftops and doorways from paper patterns she found on www.notmartha.org. She's since constructed her own cookie cutters and perfected the ingredients.

The royal icing that holds them together is adapted from a recipe passed down from Andrews' grandmother. It doubles as rooftop snow. Coarse red and green sugar adds sparkle and crushed candy canes make a festive topping, too. But the sprite-sized confections are not always pretty. "I'll have a really cool idea for how I'm going to decorate it and it just ends up looking really bad," Andrews laughs. "So, unfortunately — well fortunately for me — I usually just eat them."

This year Yankton's RiverWalk cookie sale will be held Dec. 6 at the historic Lewis and Clark Theater in downtown Yankton. Doors open at 10 a.m.



Michelle's Gingerbread Houses

3 cups all-purpose flour	1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking soda	1/4 teaspoon freshly milled black pepper
3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon	3/4 cup butter flavor Crisco
3/4 teaspoon ground ginger	1/2 cup packed light brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon ground allspice	2/3 cup unsulfured molasses
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves	1 large egg

Position racks in the top and bottom thirds of the oven and preheat to 350 degrees.

Sift flour, baking soda, cinnamon, ginger, allspice, cloves, salt and pepper into a medium bowl. Set aside.

Beat shortening in a large bowl using hand-held electric mixer at high speed about 1 minute. Add brown sugar and beat until mixture is light in texture and color, about 2 minutes. Beat in the molasses and egg. Using a wooden spoon, gradually mix in flour mixture to make a stiff dough. Divide dough into two thick disks and wrap each in plastic wrap. Refrigerate about 3 hours. (Dough can be prepared up to two days ahead.)

Let one disk stand at room temperature about 10 minutes, or until warm enough to roll without cracking. Keep the other disk refrigerated until you are ready for it. Place dough on parchment paper that you will also use for baking. Sprinkle the top lightly with flour then roll between 1/8 and 1/4 inch thick. Cut the gingerbread house shapes, leaving at least 1 inch between shapes.

Bake 10 minutes, or until the edges are set and crisp. Switch the positions of the cookies from top to bottom and back to front halfway through baking. Cool on the sheets for 2 minutes, then transfer to wire cake racks to cool completely. The cookies can be prepared up to one week ahead, stored in airtight containers at room temperature.

ROYAL ICING (Makes a large batch)

4 1/2 to 5 cups powdered sugar	1/4 teaspoon salt
Approximately 3 egg whites	

Use a mixer to beat the ingredients until the mixture is thick, shines and stiff peaks form. Add more powdered sugar if too runny after about four minutes. Add a drop of water at a time if mixture is too thick to pipe. Tint with gel food coloring, if you wish. Can be frozen in a plastic bag. Thaw in refrigerator and snip an end of the bag for an instant piping bag.